

HON. A. J. FLETCHER'S SPEECH AND JOHN BAXTER VENTILATED.

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DR. BROWNLOW'S ADMINISTRATION VINDICATED.

Speech of Hon. A. J. Fletcher, Secretary of War, on the House of Representatives, delivered at Government House, June 2, 1867.

Editor of the Knoxville Whig:

I am not here to-day, as some seem to suppose, and as the *Whig* newspaper has announced, to promulgate a personal quarrel. I am not here to defend myself, nor to assail a particular individual or the record of a particular administration. I hold that a public speaker has no right to call upon the people to split the vocations and assemble to hear him give a harangue, either in defense of himself or in abuse of another. In public speaking, I presume that you care but little for the personal quarrel between John Baxter and myself. And I assure you I care but little. It is true I did consider the matter of sufficient importance to devote three minutes to him in August last, but at the time when the enemies of the country are so numerous, this is as much time as I can afford to spare to any one of them. The fifteen minutes caused poor Baxter to write out a pamphlet, and to travel a hundred miles and read it to a few rebels, and what was still more painful for him to manage, the expense of printing it. But he has found that the "damned spots" on his reputation, like those described in the play of *Hamlet*, will not wash out, and I leave him to devote the balance of his life to vain experiments in rubbing and rinsing. I shall not follow the course of my remarks to-day, notice a detail of a speech made by him at this place a month since, so far as it relates to the State Government, but I shall not deem it necessary to assault him further than the establishment of simple truth may expose him to the censure of truthful men. And I do not imitate the example of the rebel editor for Governor, who denounces every man who differs with him about disputed facts as the liar; every one who differs with him about election in his absence as a coward, and every one who will not vote for him as a scoundrel, and seems up to the whole by proclaiming the greatest portion of the age as composed of the dunces of the earth. But, as he, in a certain temper, applied his terms of abuse to the lamented Lincoln, to the Thirty-ninth Congress, to President Johnson and Union soldiers, and as I find that Mr. Lincoln's fair fame was not soiled, that the Thirty-ninth Congress are endorsed by the American people; as Johnson's reputation is not sullied by this means at least, and as some of the Union soldiers will be immortal as the saviors of this glorious government, I am prepared to expect that the reputation of the great Radical party of the country—the same of Governor Brownlow, and of the General Assembly of the State, and of the Governor's staff, will survive the hastic denunciations of the Thersites, whose heads the rebel columns in Tennessee. I shall, therefore, learn from Etheridge and Baxter that coarse epithets and malignant, but unfounded slanders injure as much as the slanderer himself.

SERVICE OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT.

Before I take up the matters of detail of such I design to speak, I propose to take a general but concise view of the origin, progress and prominent measures of the present government of Tennessee. I became connected with it a few days after its organization as Secretary of State, and have since only taken a deep interest, but an active part in its administration ever since. I will never regret the part I have performed, nor do I seek to be relieved of the responsibility of any of its important measures. The present administration of the State Government cannot be tried by the same usages and acts of former administrations. It existed under different circumstances and had different duties to perform. Let us contrast for a moment the struggle of the last two years with the halcyon days of Carroll and Cannon, of 1850, and of the Browns of a later day. Then the assembling of the Legislature and the inauguration of the Governor were important events. The voters were organized in official oaths administered to the Governor elect and a short inaugural delivered at a matter of ceremony. The message was sent in thanking the God for continued peace and plenty, congratulating the people upon their bountiful harvest, presenting a balance sheet of the Treasury and a few statistics with perhaps a laudatory paragraph against the opposition party in politics. This was his principal duty. True he had to sign a few grants and commissions, issue an occasional pardon and at a later day a few State bonds, but his chief duty was almost a secure such a

peace and somewhat embarrassed the other day at Nashville, when called upon to follow a colored senator on the stump, or find myself unable to come up to the standard of oratory exhibited by my table friend. Indeed I have come to the conclusion that the negro is a man—possessing all the faculties of a man, including reason and common sense. As the best evidence of which, I assure you that the forty thousand colored voters of Middle and West Tennessee have no manner of use for Etheridge and Baxter or their rebel supporters. They know who their friends are, and will not accordingly. I have said the object of enfranchising the colored man was to elevate him in the scale of being and to enable him to protect himself. The result has shown the wisdom of the measure. Those who had from the first resisted every measure for the relief of the colored man by every means, fair and foul, and predicted or threatened his destruction if enfranchised, are the first to take him by the hand, hail him brother, and bow to the majesty of a colored American citizen. The rebel State convention, composed of men who had made these threats and predictions, the same that nominated Etheridge, was the first to give them words as delegates. It would have amused you to have seen in that convention John Baxter's cheek not more than a finger's length from Joe Williams' jaw, and Judge Grant walking out on an airing with his colored friend. The white handkerchief of Ed. Cooper needed no perfume on that occasion. Brethren (and sisters) of all colors dwell together in unity. Such was the magic effect of placing the ballot in colored hands. Etheridge will now get five hundred dollars that he never was opposed to negro suffrage, and Baxter will incur "considerable expense"—his greatest annoyance—to secure a negro vote. They no longer deride the idea of walking up to the polls by the side of a "big buck negro." I know hundreds of them who would gladly exercise that important privilege.

Not so with what is interestingly called "Brownlow's Government." Born as it were upon a field of blood, it was the price of gigantic struggle—the ransom of many thousand lives—guaranteed to the people by the strong arm of the nation, whose power had wreathed it from the clutches of a million of rebels. It came into existence in the midst of anarchy, bloodshed, demoralization and financial ruin. It is the successor and indeed the product of that Government, which was written at Washington upon half a sheet of paper and handed to a Brigadier General, and proclaimed from the cannon's mouth in a hundred battles. It may be considered now in its second stage. Whether there shall be a third and happier stage of this State Government will depend on the conduct of those who are responsible. We will show, I am sure, that we have not since 1862.

NOT THE WORK OF THE MAJORITY, AND WHY NOT.

I, for one, do not claim that this State Government was established by a majority of the people of Tennessee, and God be thanked that it was not. Its establishment was in spite of them and in defiance of their bayonets, and it has been maintained and will be maintained for the protection of our loyal people, whether its enemies be led by outspoken rebels or Union deserters. If the majority could have had their way in the formation of a government, you who rallied to the flag of your country would to-day be outlaws, and your property would have been confiscated to pay the rebel war debt of the State. The books of my office show that in 1861 five millions of dollars in State bonds were issued by Isham G. Harris to support his own army of fifty-five thousand men then making war upon the Union men by robbing them of their property, burning their houses and hanging them, or casting them into prisons. These bonds would have fallen due last year, and are held by rebel officers and army contractors. Think you that if the wanted majority could have acted, they would not have provided for the payment of these bonds? And how, sire? By the confiscation of the property of Union men. Such was the declared intention of the rebel leaders during the war. Ask an honest, truthful rebel privately to-day what they intended to do with the Union men if they had secured their Confederacy, and he will answer you promptly, like Henry A. Wise, "we would have driven them out of the State, and have confiscated their property to pay the war debt." And yet such men as Etheridge and Baxter declare the State Government void because a majority did not establish it! Oh! but we are told that the war is over now and rebels could do the Union men no harm by simply having control of the State of Tennessee. But the same men tell you that the States are sovereign in the management of their internal affairs, and that the General Government has no right to interfere with a State, and they have a powerful party at the North, who preach the same doctrine. This party lately carried the State of Connecticut and came very near carrying the great State of New York. Give them all the Southern States and a few doubtful States North and, sure enough, the General Government would not interfere in your behalf, and the scenes of 1861 would soon recur: the Confederate war debt would be revived; the negroes again reduced to slavery or to a condition worse than slavery and Union men would again be hunted down and driven from the State.

THE DIFFICULTIES AT THE ORGANIZATION.

But to recur to the origin of the State Government. Its inauguration was no act of idle ceremony. It was performed under the protection of the guns of Maj. General Thomas. On the day the Legislature assembled, the gallant Sheridan was "pushing matters" on Lee's partially beaten columns, and on the day the Governor was inaugurated, Grant was towing parolees to the officers and soldiers of Lee's army, while the columns of Joe Johnston, Kirby Smith and Dick Taylor were still unbroken. The loyal citizens of the State had, for the most part, been driven out of it, and were then either in the Federal army, or wandering as exiles in other States. The State itself was a disputed field of war, the contesting forces alternating in the occupancy of large districts, so that women and children and non-combatants knew not on which what flag would wave over them the next. When the rebel armies were forced to sur-

render, and the smoke of the contest cleared away, the great State of Tennessee was politically, socially, financially and morally a wreck—a ruin. I need not describe in detail now, what you all saw and felt. It was not the fortune of Governor Brownlow in his message to secure thanks for peace and plenty, and to congratulate the people upon the continued prosperity of the State. He was a widely different task. To invoke protection for the lives and property of Union people to revive the tribunals of justice; to point the Legislature to an empty Treasury—a heavy debt and a bankrupt people; to call attention to the wreck of our railroads and wharves, and above all to the empty school houses from one end of the State to the other, and to devise ways and means to supply and support them—the entire fund which had endowed them having been stolen and carried away by the rebels in their first flight from the State, in February, 1862—this was the gloomy and appalling task imposed upon an old man of double health, but of a stout heart and resolute will. He did not falter, neither did a majority of the Legislature. The difficulty of the great work of restoration was increased by the constant opposition and abuse of that blessed majority of which we hear so much, who cast every possible obstacle in the way. The embarrassment was further heightened by the fact that the relations of the State to the Union had been severed and the new government had not been recognized, and that blessed majority were determined it should not be. Though sustained by only a minority of the people, the Governor and his friends, and a majority of the Legislature did not falter, but addressed themselves to the task—a task sufficient to dishearten the boldest and most experienced statesmen. At first they relied greatly upon the fact that one of their own number had become President of the United States, but in the darkest hour of their struggle he deserted them, and the fact became apparent that he had only been a Union man from policy. Others followed him for similar reasons. They believed the handful of Union men, as they termed them, must be overwhelmed in Tennessee. Some deserted us for one reason and some for another. In the Legislature, Cooper, Hood, Steele, Garrett, Bowen, and many others followed Johnson with the hope, and probably with the promise, of official reward. Such men as the Gaits, Baxter, and men of smaller caliber in your own town—never of fixed principles—adhered to the enemy because there was where the money was to be made. Nelson, Heskett, Campbell, and other fossils stood still on the doctrines of Calhoun—honour, perhaps, but wholly incapable of change or progress. The President, though he was the military agent who had set the government on foot, and claimed its paternity, undertook the unnatural task of destroying it. He was actuated by inordinate ambition. Like the coarser class of brutes, he attempted to devour his own offspring, and was only prevented by the interposition of the Thirty-ninth Congress, that greatest body of men who ever assembled in a legislative capacity on this continent.

MEASURES ADOPTED—EMANCIPATION.

Let us now briefly notice the practical measures these resolute men have adopted to protect the loyal people and to redeem the State from chaos and anarchy. Regarding the institution of slavery as the cause of all their sufferings, in conformity to the sense of the nation and the will of heaven, their first act was to strike the shackles from every slave in the State, and as this act made the freedman a citizen, and endowed him with rights to be protected, and rendered him liable to wrongs to be redressed, they set about to disencumber the assertion of these rights and to remove every obstacle in the way of redressing his wrongs, and finally to arm him with the elective franchise, whereby he might protect himself. The repeal of the slave code, the passage of the negro testimony bill, the equal rights bill, and finally the negro suffrage law, were but successive steps resulting from the abolition of slavery towards the elevation of the freedman in the scale of being and to fit him for the important duties of an American citizen. It may be true that many of them are as yet untried for the exercise of political rights; but I know of no better way to teach them the use of those rights than to let them exercise them. As the infant must have the control of his limbs before he can walk, and must often stagger and fall in guiding them, so the freedman must have the ballot in his hands before he can vote at all, and he must needs make some mistakes before he becomes perfect in its use. I pause here to say to you that my early notions of the capacity of the negro are rapidly giving way before facts that I see daily occurring. I was agreeably surprised to find him making a brave and obedient soldier and always fighting on the right side. I have been agreeably surprised to meet crowds of colored children going and returning from school with books, slates, maps and manuscripts, denoting rapid progress in the acquisition of knowledge. I was much sur-

prised and somewhat embarrassed the other day at Nashville, when called upon to follow a colored senator on the stump, or find myself unable to come up to the standard of oratory exhibited by my table friend. Indeed I have come to the conclusion that the negro is a man—possessing all the faculties of a man, including reason and common sense. As the best evidence of which, I assure you that the forty thousand colored voters of Middle and West Tennessee have no manner of use for Etheridge and Baxter or their rebel supporters. They know who their friends are, and will not accordingly. I have said the object of enfranchising the colored man was to elevate him in the scale of being and to enable him to protect himself. The result has shown the wisdom of the measure. Those who had from the first resisted every measure for the relief of the colored man by every means, fair and foul, and predicted or threatened his destruction if enfranchised, are the first to take him by the hand, hail him brother, and bow to the majesty of a colored American citizen. The rebel State convention, composed of men who had made these threats and predictions, the same that nominated Etheridge, was the first to give them words as delegates. It would have amused you to have seen in that convention John Baxter's cheek not more than a finger's length from Joe Williams' jaw, and Judge Grant walking out on an airing with his colored friend. The white handkerchief of Ed. Cooper needed no perfume on that occasion. Brethren (and sisters) of all colors dwell together in unity. Such was the magic effect of placing the ballot in colored hands. Etheridge will now get five hundred dollars that he never was opposed to negro suffrage, and Baxter will incur "considerable expense"—his greatest annoyance—to secure a negro vote. They no longer deride the idea of walking up to the polls by the side of a "big buck negro." I know hundreds of them who would gladly exercise that important privilege.

LEGISLATION OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT.

I will not stop here to discuss the legitimacy of the State Government. When the State was reformed we found ourselves without any government—no Governor, no Legislature, no courts of justice and no executive and no ministerial officers. Ordinarily it is a natural right of every community in this condition to form a government, and when this state of things comes at the end of a war this work is always performed by the conquering party, but in our system the work of governing a new government to a State thus situated, is the work of the General Government. And this is precisely what has been done—first by the military power and next by the Congress of the United States. Yes, this *is* the State Government, in conformity to the Constitution of the United States, was proclaimed by President Lincoln through his military agent, and solemnly legitimated by joint resolution of both Houses of the American Congress. You see such men as Etheridge and Baxter, J. C. Gaits and J. S. Brien, declaring it a usurpation, its laws null and void, and demanding its overthrow. It is true that at present they do not proclaim their sedition designs, simply because they dare not, and because an open avowal of their schemes would defeat the end they have in view. They advise submission for the present, but the records of those men and the opinions of their speaker denote too plainly their seditious aims.

NEGRO SUFFRAGE.

I have said that the negro was enfranchised for his own protection. I may add that other great reasons made it necessary. It was necessary for the protection of the loyal white men of the State that their rank should be recruited by loyal voters of whatever color. A contest was approaching, the same that is now on, as to whether the rebel shall submit, whether the blue or the gray shall prevail; a contest involving the well or the woe of ourselves and our posterity. To have gone into such a struggle, involving such issues, with forty thousand of our friends—our men—unarmed, would have been unpardonable folly. Proceeding by the example of the General Government, who opened the doors of her army to the negro in the dark hours of the struggle for the Union, we have opened the portals of the ballot-box to him, and now, as then, we find him faithful. But there was another reason. A great principle—nay, the very genius of our government—demanded the enfranchisement of every loyal citizen. While the statement of Etheridge that there are 120,000 disfranchised citizens in Tennessee is simply propoganda, still to have disfranchised both rebels and negroes would have left a majority of the people without the elective franchise, and subjected the government to the charge of not being republican in form. This was the pretext upon which Johnson proposed its overthrow. The heaviest vote cast in the State show that the voting population, before the war, was about 125,000. This was certainly reduced to 100,000 by the war. The regular reports of the Commissioners of Registration, under the act of 1865, now filed in my office, show that 42,974 white voters were registered in that year. Many were afterwards registered at the quarterly courts and reported to the County Courts, probably about 10,000. A number of others did not come forward and make the necessary proof to obtain certificates who might have done so, some whom are now being registered under the new law. From a careful estimate, based on the statistics of my office, I estimate the number of persons entitled to the elective franchise, under the act of 1865, at 60,000. This leaves the number of persons actually disfranchised at 40,000. Add to these the disfranchised negroes, generally estimated at 40,000, and there would have been a clear majority of the people disfranchised—one-half of them by their color, and the other half by their crimes. We might have quoted President Johnson to prove that rebels had forfeited their citizenship, and were not to be counted for any purpose, but the Legislature chose the wiser course of enfranchising all the friends of the Union. So that upon a reasonable estimate, we have now 100,000 enfranchised, and only 40,000 disfranchised citizens.

THE FRANCHISE LAW.

The Franchise law has been by far the most exciting measure adopted by the present Legislature. The necessity of its passage is so generally recog-